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Robert N. Lynch

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# THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR A HUMAN LIFE AMENDMENT, INC.: ITS GOALS AND ORIGINS

ROBERT N. LYNCH\*

The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, Inc., is a new organization which has been established by the nation's Catholic bishops for the single purpose of securing a constitutional amendment protecting the life of the unborn. While the need for such a committee is directly attributable to the 1973 decision of the United States Supreme Court and its consequent effects, the decision to form this organization was not made until the annual general meeting of bishops in November of 1973.

At their November meeting, the bishops, after reflecting upon the activities and promise of all the various pro-life groups presently in existence, decided that another group would be necessary to answer those critics who had charged them with failure to provide leadership in the pro-life area. Borrowing upon the model which was utilized during the ultimately unsuccessful effort to secure federal income tax credits for the parents of nonpublic school children, and upon the advice of counsel and of the General Counsel of the United States Catholic Conference, the bishops decided to establish a separate corporation which would meet the requirements of the Internal Revenue Code.

In January of 1974 the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment was incorporated under the laws and statutes of the state of Delaware. Serving on the initial board of directors are the following distinguished pro-life advocates from around the country: Mr. Theodore N. Staudt, Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio; Thomas Ford, Esquire, of Brooklyn, New York; Mrs. Valerie Vance Dillon, Assistant Director of the Indiana Catholic Conference, Indianapolis; Mrs. Rose Polito of Southern California Right to Life, Van Nuys, California; Judge James Ryan of Detroit, Michigan; Martin F. McKernan, Jr., Esquire, of Camden, New Jersey; Mr. Alfred Scanlan, Esquire, of Washington, D.C., member

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\*President and Executive Director, The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment, Inc., Washington, D.C.

of the board of directors and counsel to the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. Additionally, it is my pleasure to serve as President of the corporation and a member of the board of directors.

The nature of the business and the purposes of the corporation are quite clearly spelled out in the certificate of incorporation which was filed and accepted by the state of Delaware. "First, to educate interested Americans to the need for a human life amendment to the Constitution of the United States; secondly, to protect the lives of children conceived but not yet born; thirdly, to educate interested Americans concerning the process to be followed in securing the enactment of a human life amendment by approval of the Congress of the United States and the ratification thereof by the several States of the Union; fourthly, to point out the moral and ethical dilemmas which exist in the absence of such a human life amendment; fifthly, to provide an opportunity and forum through which interested Americans may express their religious convictions and personal beliefs that a human life amendment to the Constitution of the United States is required in order to erase the moral and ethical problems which have resulted from recent decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States on the question of abortion; sixthly, to represent the desires of interested Americans who oppose abortion legislation now pending before or to be introduced in the Congress of the United States; and finally, to pursue all lawful procedures and means to secure an amendment to the Constitution of the United States which will protect the lives of the children conceived but not yet born."

Upon the recommendation and advice of our Counsel, Mr. Alfred Scanlan, the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment's Board of Directors held their first meeting on February 14, 1974. At that time, I was elected President of the corporation and it was decided that the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment would take whatever steps were necessary to qualify as a foreign corporation doing business in the District of Columbia. Furthermore, it was also decided that the corporation would take such steps as may be required to achieve the status of a tax-exempt corporation under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code. Finally, it was decided that the President should take such steps as would be required to register the corporation and appropriate employees under the Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act and that the President would see to it that such reports required under the Act would be properly and timely filed by the corporation and such of its employees who might be required to register under the statute. This third and final recommendation does mark a significant departure from previous procedures utilized in that the corporation and its agents will be registered and proper reports will be filed with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives.

The corporation anticipates a projected life of at least two and one-half years. In November of 1976, a thorough analysis will be made of any

progress toward enactment of a human life amendment made to that time. At that point the bishops of the nation will decide whether they wish to continue the corporation, wish to join forces with another group operating in the field of securing a human life amendment, or wish to withdraw for the moment from all immediate pro-life activities.

To enable the corporation to perform its work, the bishops have pledged to secure five hundred thousand dollars for the two and one-half year existence of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. Each bishop was approached by Cardinal Krol acting in his capacity of Archbishop of Philadelphia and requested to contribute approximately one cent per Catholic to this important cause. At the present time, I am pleased to report that from approximately one third of the dioceses of the nation we have received one-half of the projected and budgeted amount of money necessary.

The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment hopes to achieve three purposes in the first year of its existence: First, to act as a catalyst in bringing together all of the various pro-life forces operative throughout the nation. It is not our hope or intention in any way to infringe upon legitimate exercise of activity on the part of these other organizations. We only hope that a unity of purpose and resolve can be achieved whereby all of the various organizations and people who believe in the necessity for a human life amendment can be brought together and work in a common effort to secure a common goal.

Secondly, we hope to begin an intensive clergy education program which will be operative at select locations throughout the country this year with a continuation of the program in each of the two succeeding years. One-day clergy conferences on the subject of a human life amendment are currently being planned. It is hoped that the priests of the nation can be presented with expert advice from the fields of genetics, obstetrics and gynecology, constitutional law, moral theology, as well as a presentation by myself or one of the representatives of our organization and by the local ordinary. It is the conviction of the Board of Directors of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment that it is absolutely essential that the priests form the front line in the effort to secure a human life amendment. Unfortunately, while there has been no noticeable decline in opposition to abortion on the part of our clergy, there has been a slight, almost imperceptible increase in the feeling among Catholic people, clergy included, that it is not acceptable or right for one religion to enforce its morality onto others. This issue can hopefully be laid to rest only when seen in terms of the basic issue of human rights which is operative in the abortion question. The human rights issue transcends any question of the morality espoused by any given church and strikes at the very heart of the principles upon which this nation was founded.

The third goal for the first year of this program is to assist in the organizational work throughout the nation on a uniform basis for state

units of pro-life groups. Little credibility can be ascribed to a representative of a Washington organization for whom it is clear that there exists no constituency back home. It is absolutely essential that pro-life groups be formed and organized where they are not currently operative.

This brings up the difficult question of the relationship between the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment and the National Right to Life Committee. Since many of you have had long and fruitful dealings with the state units of the National Right to Life Committee Association, I would like to take just a few moments of your time to speak to this issue.

In mid-March it was my good fortune to appear before the executive committee of the National Right to Life Committee. At that time, I indicated to them that, contrary to their suspicions, the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment does not pose a serious threat to the continued viability and success of the National Right to Life Committee movement. I indicated at that time and I reaffirm at the present moment that this new corporation is not a membership organization. The constituency that I serve is limited to the bishop donors who support the cause and programs of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. Secondly, the entire money from which the corporation will be operated will be gained through the direct appeal to the bishop ordinaries of the nation. I do not contemplate now or at some uncertain time in the future a national fund-raising activity which would put the new National Committee for a Human Life Amendment at odds with the National Right to Life Committee in its quest for funds and fund-raising opportunities. On the contrary, I believe a successful National Committee for a Human Life Amendment will result in a stronger National Right to Life Committee as our organizational efforts, primarily in those states without State Catholic Conferences and without strong pro-life organizations, can only redound to the favor of this national membership organization.

The National Committee for a Human Life Amendment is basically an effort on the part of the Catholic bishops to secure the support and encouragement of our Catholic people for a human life amendment. Therefore, for the present moment, no effort will be made to expand the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment into a broad-based ecumenical organization, primarily because such an ecumenical organization, so very necessary if this issue is to ever see the light of day, does exist in the National Right to Life Committee which has met with a fair measure of success in securing the support of various non-Catholic sects and denominations. I hope that I can encourage other religious groups into joining a coalition in conjunction with the National Right to Life Committee. I feel that our time can best be spent in securing the unanimous and uniform support of our Catholic people, also without which the movement is doomed.

Since the funds for the corporation have been secured from the free

will and generous donations of the bishop ordinaries of the nation, there is no financial, moral, or personal relationship with the United States Catholic Conference-National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The Division of Family Life of the United States Catholic Conference, long an outspoken and effective proponent of a human life amendment, has withdrawn from active participation in the debate and dialogue on a constitutional amendment. The Division of Family Life of the United States Catholic Conference will continue, however, to speak with the continued clarity and force on all other life issues such as fetal experimentation, euthanasia, and population. The single purpose of the new corporation is to secure at the earliest possible moment a human life amendment to the United States Constitution. Thus, there is no redundancy between the activities of the Division of Family Life, the offices of Government Liaison, and of General Counsel with those activities of the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. We have, in effect, become the spokesman for the nation's Catholic bishops on the human life amendment issue.

There will be those people, as indeed there have already been, who will take serious exception to this action of the nation's bishops. Some would say that the action in itself was divisive of the pro-life forces. I think that ultimately, when the history of the effort has been written, the action of the bishops will be seen in its proper perspective, namely, an effort to bring together the various forces and to unite them for the single goal of securing a human life amendment.

And now a few words about the chances for enactment and ratification of such an amendment. Candor compels that we freely admit among ourselves that such an amendment will probably not happen overnight. Even if the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives were favorably disposed to such an amendment, and it is not, a casual perusal of the Washington Post would indicate that its attentions are currently being diverted to other matters. Only last week I heard the majority leader of the House of Representatives, Congressman Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, outline a schedule for House activity for the balance of this year. Under the tentative timetable outlined by the majority leadership of the House, the impeachment inquiry and debate would probably last until September 1. Of course, it is clear that more and more of the Congress' attention is being directed to this issue. All of this is by way of indicating that while we have not given up hope of early consideration by the Senate and the House of Representatives, it becomes clear that significant and major action on this issue will not occur in the next Congress.

It seems that our goal today is to secure the strongest possible support of the members of the House and Senate for a human life amendment. We certainly do not discourage those efforts of other groups in securing signatures for the discharge petition on the Hogan Resolution. We are watching with great interest the hearings which are being conducted by the Senate sub-committee on constitutional amendments of the Senate Judiciary

Committee. These hearings give us our greatest hope for progress in this year. They could, however, only be a delaying tactic. We hope that this is not true and we will do all in our power to see that serious consideration of a constitutional amendment protecting the right to life of the unborn be given the highest priority by the Judiciary Committee of the Senate.

One cannot deny an upsurge in feeling on the part of the American public for a human life amendment. I would hesitate, however, to say that there is sufficient public sentiment to ultimately ratify such an amendment in three-fourths of the states. A great deal of public information and education work remains to be done. Not all of it can be assumed by the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. It must be shared with all who believe as we that the right to life is an inalienable right guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. It must be seen in terms of a human right, and not in terms of a Catholic or other ecclesiastical and theological position.

I do not harbor any illusions about my personal leadership ability in leading this very difficult but most important movement. However, I am sustained in moments of personal weakness by the knowledge that many fine people throughout the nation, especially people like this group, Diocesan Attorneys, are firmly and irrevocably committed to the concept of the dignity of every human life. With the support and encouragement and assistance of groups such as this, we can make substantial progress this year and, in the very near future, hopefully, can rejoice in the enactment of a human life amendment to the United States Constitution.